

Latvian Citizens' Group Demands Independence From Moscow

Associated Press

MOSCOW, April 30—A Latvian citizens' group claiming to represent hundreds of thousands of Latvians demanded today that the republic follow Lithuania's lead and declare independence from the Soviet Union, a spokeswoman said.

In Lithuania, about 20,000 people gathered to honor a countryman who burned himself to death in Moscow to protest the Kremlin's efforts to end Lithuania's independence drive.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis called Stanislovas Jarmaitis, 52, "the first victim" in the struggle for independence. "And we hope he is the last," he told the crowd, according to Giedrius Druk-

teimis of the Sajudis pro-independence movement.

Latvian spokeswoman Ivetta Buicke, voicing sentiments identical to those heard in Lithuania, said, "This is an occupied country. We are under Soviet power here, under an occupying army."

The Latvian Citizens' Congress, elected mainly from among ethnic Latvians, convened today and called for restoration of Latvian independence, Buicke said.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia were independent countries between World War I and World War II but were forcibly annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

Ethnic Latvians make up just over half of Latvia's population of 2.7 million, and a poll published to-

day by the Soviet government newspaper Izvestia said that 92 percent of those polled favor secession. Non-Latvian residents make up 46 percent of the republic, and 45 percent were for independence.

The congress met three days before the official Latvian Supreme Soviet parliament was to consider whether to emulate Lithuania's March 11 independence declaration.

The Estonian parliament also has made clear it intends to follow Lithuania in seceding from the Soviet Union, but more cautiously.

The Latvian congress claims the right to replace the republic's Supreme Soviet during the transition to independence. Its members were elected in March by registered eth-

nic Latvian voters. It says it represents about 700,000 Latvians.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev recently told Latvian delegates that he would offer the republic special status in a reconfigured Soviet federation but would not accept outright secession.

Gorbachev embargoed oil and natural gas shipments to Lithuania in response to its parliament's declaration of independence, although the sanctions do not seem to have dampened the Lithuanians' drive for sovereignty.

Official Vilnius Radio reported on Sunday that Moscow planned to ease the sanctions by increasing natural gas deliveries to a large fertilizer plant at Jonava. However, deliveries did not increase today.